

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3713

INFO AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 11835

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SK, IN

SUBJECT: SIKKIM

REF: NEW DELHI 11760

1. SUMMARY: AMENDMENTS TO THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION CHANGING SIKKIM'S STATUS FROM A PROTECTORATE TO AN ASSOCIATE STATE OF INDIA WERE APPROVED BY THE LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT SEPTEMBER 4. THE CHOYAL APPEARS TO BE RECONCILED. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS INDICATE THE GOI WAS SURPRISED BY THE NEPALESE RE-ACTION BUT DO NOT EXPECT BILATERAL RELATIONS TO SUFFER.

2. SIKKIMESE BILL NEWARS ENACTMENT--THE LOK SABHA (LOWER HOUSE) OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVED THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BILL LATE EVENING SEPTEMBER 4. DURING THE DEBATE FOREIGN MINISTER SING DECLARED THAT SIKKIM WOULD "CEASE TO BE A PROTECTORATE" AS SOON AS BOTH HOUSES
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ADOPTED THE BILL AND THE CONSTITUTION WERE AMENDED.

DURING THE DEBATE SINGH REJECTED AN AMENDMENT PROPOSING THAT SIKKIM BE MADE THE TWENTY-SECOND STATE OF THE UNION. ACCORDING TO SINGH SIKKIM BECOMES NO MORE THAN AN "ASSOCIATE STATE" OF THE INDIAN UNION AND RETAINS ITS SEPARATE IDENTITY UNDER THE TERMS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S BILL. WITH RESPECT TO THE FUTURE OF THE CHOGYAL, SINGH DECLARED: "IF THEY (THE SIKKIMESE PEOPLE) WANT TO DECIDE TO DO AWAY WITH THE INSTITUTION OF SHOGYAL, IT IS FOR THEM TO DECIDE. WE CANNOT COME IN THEIR WAY. CONSISTENT WITH OUR GENERAL POLICY OF NOT INTERFERING WITH THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF OTHER STATES."

3. ENCOURAGEMENT OF SEPARATIST TENDENCIES? DURING THE LOK SABHA DEBATE SOME SUPPORTERS OF THE BILL AS WELL AS SEVERAL CRITICS EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE NEW CONCEPT OF "ASSOCIATE STATE" MIGHT ENCOURAGE SEVERAL EXISTING STATES AND TERRITORIES (KASHMIR, NAGALAND AND MIZORAM) TO SEEK TO REVISE THEIR STATUS IN FAVOR OF UNION ASSOCIATION. BUT SINGH FLATLY REJECTED THE APPLICABILITY OF THIS CONCEPT TO STATES/ TERRITORIES ALREADY WITHIN THE UNION, AND ARGUED THERE WAS IN FACT AN HISTORIC PROCESS LEADING TO INDIA'S "GREATER COHESION." AS TO WHETHER THE SIKKIMESE PEOPLE COULD REVOKE THEIR PRESENT DECISION TO OPT FOR ASSOCIATE STATUS, SINGH SAID THIS DECISION HAD BEEN "VERY SOLEMN" AND NOW COULD ONLY BE ALTERED BY MUTUAL AGREEMENT. THERE COULD BE NO UNILATERAL DECISION BY SIKKIM TO REVOKE ASSOCIATE STATUS.

4. SHOGYAL'S PLANS--THE CHOGYAL HAS DECIDED NOT TO TRAVEL TO DELHI. HE TOLD JOURNALISTS IN CALCUTTA SEPTEMBER 4 THAT HE WOULD NOT TAKE THE QUESTION OF SIKKIM'S STATUS TO AN "INTERNATIONAL LEVEL" BUT WOULD BANK ON INDIA'S "SENSE OF JUSTICE." "HOW CAN WE GO AND FIGHT WITH THE GOI," HE IS QUOTED SAYING, "OURS IS A PROTECTORATE OF INDIA, A VERY SMALL STATE."

5. GOI'S MOTIVATION IN QUICKLY MOVING THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT--INDIAN OFFICIALS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN DENY THAT THE GOI'S HASTE IN MOVING THE BILL REFLECTS ANYTHING BUT APPROPRIATE INDIAN CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES. DIRECTOR OF MEA NORTHERN DIVISION RANA TOLD AN EMBASSY

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OFFICER SEPTEMBER 4 THAT GOI RESPECT FOR PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE REQUIRED THAT THE GOI'S PLAN TO CREATE AN ASSOCIATE STATUS FOR SIKKIM BE ANNOUNCED ONLY WITH THE PRESENTATION OF THE SIKKIMESE BILL IN LOK SABHA. RANA LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE GOI MAY HAVE BEEN INHIBITED FROM BRINGING THE PROPOSED BILL TO THE ATTENTION OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS IN ADVANCE THROUGH DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS BECAUSE OF THIS REQUIREMENT AND JOINT SECRETARY (EAST ASIA AND

NORTHERN DIVISION) N.B. MENON CONFIRMED THIS TO POLITICAL COUNSELOR SUBSEQUENTLY. FOREIGN MINISTER SINGH WAS REPORTEDLY ASKED DIRECTLY BY SEVERAL LOWER HOUSE MEMBERS (DURING A MEETING OF MPS SERVING ON AN MEA CONSULTATIVE MEETING) WHETHER THERE WERE FEARS THE CHOGYAL WAS "COLLUDING WITH THE CHINESE." ACCORDING TO THE INDIAN EXPRESS SEPTEMBER 5, SINGH ASSURED THEM THIS WAS NOT THE CASE.

6. CHINESE AND NEPALESE REACTION-- NORTHERN DIVISION DIRECTOR RANA SAID THE GOI WAS NOT REALLY SURE WHAT WAS TROUBLING THE NEPALESE. THE NEPALESE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION SEEMED "FOGGY", AND HAD NOT BEEN ARTICULATED WITH ANY CLARITY, ACCORDING TO RANA. HE FELT THE NEPALESE HAD REACTED HASTILY, AND POPULAR FEELINGS WERE BEING FANNED BY BOTH DETRACTORS OF INDIA AND ILL-CONCEIVED STATEMENTS BY NEPALESE FRIENDS OF INDIA. ON THE OTHER HAND, RANA SAID CHINA'S REACTION REFLECTED HER HISTORIC POSITION. THE GOI WAS SIMPLY NOT SURE WHETHER THE CHINESE STATEMENTS HAVE BEEN "WELL MEASURED" OR MORE DESIGNED FOR A SHORT-TERM POLITICAL EFFECT.

7. MENON TOLD POLITICAL COUNSELOR HE HAD CALLED IN NEPALESE AMBASSADOR MALLA SEPTEMBER 5 TO TELL HIM FON MIN KARKI'S COMMENTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS IN KATHMANDU WERE NOT APPROPRIATE OR HELPFUL. HE SAID NEPAL HAD NOT CONVEYED ANY POWERFUL MESSAGE, PROTEST OR RESERVATIONS TO GOI ABOUT SIKKIM. MENON SAID HE THOUGH NEPALI REACTION (WHICH HE SAID WAS MAINLY SPURRED BY PRO-PRC YOUTH, WITH ONLY A "FEW" NEPALI LEGISLATORS SUPPORTING) HAD BEEN PRECIPITATED BY QUICK AND SHARP CHINESE COMMENT. HE NOTED NCNA WAS PICKING AND WIDELY DISSEMINATING ANTI-INDIAN PRESS COMMENT IN NEPAL ON SIKKIM. MENON ADMITTED THE NEPALESE RE-

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ACTION HAD TAKEN INDIA BY SURPRISE BUT STOUTLY MAINTAINED INDO-NEPALESE RELATIONS WOULD NOT SUFFER.

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8. MENON WAS EXTREMELY CAUTIOUS IN ASSESSING IMPORT OF CHINESE COMMENTARY, STRESSING GOI WOULD HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE HOW INITIAL PEKING REACTION WAS FOLLOWED UP. HE AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT IT WOULD NOT HELP PROGRESS OF SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS. HE REITERATED FONMIN'S COMMENT THAT INDIANS DID NOT BELIEVE CHINESE WERE MEDDLING IN SIKKIM. NEVERTHELESS IN RESPONDING TO A QUESTION ON WHY THE GOI FELT OBLIGED TO ACCEED NOW TO SIKKIM ASSEMBLY'S REQUEST FOR "ASSOCIATION" WITH INDIA, HE SAID A KEY GOI MOTIVATION HAD BEEN CONCERN THAT IF IT HAD NOT, NEW AND SHARP CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ASSEMBLY AND CHOGYAL COULD HAVE LED TO COMMUNAL CLASHES AND TO COLLAPSE OF CHOGYAL'S ENTIRE POSITION.

9. MENON WAS MOST UNCOMFORTABLE IN EXPLAINING FONMIN'S COMMENTS ON SIKKIM NO LONGER BEING AN INDIAN PROTECTORATE AND ON THE SIKKIM ASSEMBLY'S RIGHT TO GET RID OF THE CHOGYAL ANYTIME IT WISHED. HE VIRTUALLY ADMITTED THESE
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POSITIONS HAD NOT BEEN IN THE FONMIN'S BRIEF AND HE WAS SURPRISED THE FONMIN "WHO SEEMED MORE FLUSTERED BEFORE THE MP QUESTIONS THAN I HAD EVER SEEN HIM" HAD GONE SO FAR IN THE HEAT OF DEBATE. HE DID NOT DENY THE FONMIN'S COMMENTS AND MERELY SAID HE WOULD NOW HAVE TO CONSIDER HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM IN TERMS OF POLICY. HE INSISTED TO THE END THAT, EVEN IF SIKKIM WAS NO LONGER

A "PROTECTORATE" AND EVEN IF THE CHOGYAL COULD BE DEPOSED AT THE WILL OF THE ASSEMBLY, THE "BASIC NATURE OF THE INDO-SIKKIM RELATIONSHIP HAD NOT CHANGED SINCE THE 1950 TREATY."

10. COMMENT: THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE INDIAN MOVES REMAIN SOMEWHAT MURKY. BUT INCREASINGLY IT LOOKS, REGARDLESS OF WHAT THE CHOGYAL HIMSELF MAY DO, AS THOUGH HIS TENURE IS EXTREMELY FRAGILE AND WILL NOT BE EXTENDED INDEFINITELY. THE GOI IS AT THE VERY MINIMUM PERFECTLY WILLING TO ACCOMMODATE ITSELF TO THIS. WHATEVER THE INDIANS MAY CHOOSE TO CALL THE NEW SIKKIM RELATIONSHIP, SIKKIM IS CLEARLY NOW PART OF INDIA.

1. THE BHUTANESE HAVE BEEN QUIET AS MICE SO FAR AND WE EXPECT THEY WILL CONTINUE TO BE SO. WHETHER THE GRADUALLY IMPROVING RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND NEPAL WILL BE SERIOUSLY SET BACK AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT EVENTS AND WHAT IS CLEARLY AN INDIAN MISREADING OF THE IMPACT ON NEPAL REMAINS TO BE SEEN AND WE WILL WELCOME CONTINUING ASSESSMENTS FROM EMBASSY KATHMANDU ON THIS.
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